UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1997/111
4 February 1997

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-third session
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE

Notes verbale dated 18 June, 8 August and 22 October 1996 from the Permanent Mission of the League of Arab States to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the High Commissioner for Human Rights/ Centre for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of the League of Arab States to the United Nations Office at Geneva presents its compliments to the High Commissioner for Human Rights/Centre for Human Rights and has the honour to transmit herewith the monthly reports on Israeli practices in the Palestinian and occupied Arab territories for April, May and August 1996.*

The Permanent Mission of the League of Arab States wishes to express its deep concern at the aggravation of the situation of Arab civilians in the territories occupied by Israel, as described in the attached reports. It requests the High Commissioner for Human Rights/Centre for Human Rights to consider these reports as official documents and to circulate them to the members of the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-third session.

* The annexed reports are reproduced as received in the language of submission and English only.

Annex

[Original: Arabic]

Monthly report on the latest developments on the question of Palestine during the month of April 1996

1. Israeli measures in the West Bank

In addition to the blockade which they had imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 25 February 1996 and which continued throughout the month of April, during that month the Israeli authorities intensified their security measures in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by imposing a full security cordon around the Palestinian National Authority areas and stepping up their control and search operations at the roadblocks between the Palestinian areas and at the crossing points leading inside the "Green Line". In fact, on 19 April 1996, they ordered the Palestinian towns and villages to be isolated from each other and prevented their residents from travelling between them. This led to a deterioration in living conditions in those towns and villages and had adverse effects on various aspects of life in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. On 20 April 1996, by order of the Israeli army commander in the West Bank (Bar-Ilan), the Israeli authorities began to demarcate the borders separating the West Bank from the Gaza Strip and, on 5 April 1996, the Israeli army completed its operations aimed at the reoccupation of 465 Palestinian villages situated in zone B.

The Israeli authorities also carried out more confiscation operations in various areas of the West Bank, particularly at Qaryut, Beit Lid, Masha, Jinsafut, Mount Gerizim (Nablus), Janiya, Deir Dibwan, Rafat, Ein Yabrud and Mazra'at el-Qibliya (Ramallah). In addition to confiscating approximately half the area of the town of Bethlehem for the purpose of constructing a bypass road to the north of that town, those authorities also confiscated thousands of dunums of land for the construction of seven bypass roads in the following areas:

A bypass road passing through the villages of Bir Nabala, Rafat, Judeira, Qalandiya and Beit Hanina.

A bypass road crossing a number of villages to the east of the town of Bethlehem.

Two bypass roads crossing land belonging to the villages of Samu, Dhahiriya and Tarqumiya in the governorate of Hebron.

A bypass road crossing land belonging to Kafr el-Labad and Ramin in the district of Tulkarm.

A bypass road crossing land belonging to Jalbun in the district of Jenin.

A bypass road crossing land belonging to Ein Ayyoub in the district of Ramallah.

On 12 April 1996, it was revealed that the settlement wing of the Yesha council had prepared a secret plan, known as Ha-Emanah (the Covenant), for Israeli settlement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip which would be implemented over a period of four years when Binyamin Netanyahu became Prime Minister of Israel. The plan included the following guidelines and principles: an increase in the population of the existing settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to half a million persons; the construction of tens of thousands of additional housing units there; and the establishment of 12 new settlement nuclei and 14 Israeli military positions on the principal highways in the West Bank. In addition to their demolition of eight houses in the city of Jerusalem and eight others in the town of Hebron during the month, the Israeli authorities committed numerous violations affecting the city of Jerusalem, the Islamic holy places therein and the West Bank. These violations are illustrated by the following:

(a) With effect from 1 April 1996, the Israeli Ministry of the Interior began to cancel the citizenship rights of all persons born in but living outside Jerusalem;

(b) The Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres placed the Ibrahimi Shrine at Hebron at the disposal of the Jews and closed it to Muslims during the Jewish festivals;

(c) On 8 April 1996, the Israeli police allowed dozens of settlers to enter the courtyards of the Haram al-Sharif at Jerusalem;

(d) On 10 April 1996, Israeli security forces raided and searched the Shari'a Court at Hebron.

On 1 April 1996, the Christian communities at Jerusalem protested at the fact that the Israeli police had beaten Christian participants in the Palm Sunday procession with truncheons and rifle butts, thereby depriving them of their freedom of worship and their right to engage in religious observances.

Israeli-United States relations

On 30 April 1996, an anti-terrorism agreement was signed at Washington by Bill Clinton, the President of the United States, and Shimon Peres, the Israeli Prime Minister. The agreement made provision for $100 million in United States assistance to promote closer cooperation between the United States and the Hebrew State in approximately 10 fields.

The principal fields covered by the agreement are as follows:

An exchange of information concerning terrorists and terrorist organizations.

Training of persons working in this field.

Exchange of experts.

Exchange of information concerning the transfer of funds to organizations involved in international terrorism.

Extradition and prosecution of suspects.

Enhancement of the ability of other parties to combat terrorism.

The agreement provided for the formation of a "joint United States-Israeli working group" to combat terrorism, which would meet twice a year.

In addition to that agreement, President Clinton and the Israeli Prime Minister also decided to form a bilateral committee chaired by the United States and Israeli Ministers for Foreign Affairs "to promote closer cooperation between the two countries in the field of defence and to officialize this cooperation whenever appropriate".

Israeli political parties and preparations for the elections to the Knesset

1. Lists of Israeli parties participating in the elections

The lists of parties preparing to enter the parliamentary elections in Israel were closed on 10 April 1996. The number of these legally authorized party lists in Israel amounts to 31: the Israeli Labour Party led by Shimon Peres; Ratz, led by Yossi Sarid, the present Minister for the Environment; Mapam, led by Yair Tzaban; and Shinui, led by the Minister Amnon Rubinstein (the latter three leftist parties will once again enter the elections with a joint list under the same name of "Meretz"); Likud, led by Binyamin Netanyahu; Tzomet, led by Rafael Eitan; and Gesher, led by David Levi (these parties have agreed to enter the elections with a joint list for which no single name has yet been chosen); Shas, the Sephardic orthodox movement, led by Aryeh Deri; the National Religious Party Mafdal, led by Zvulun Hammer; Agudath Israel, an orthodox religious party, led by Rabbi Meir Gorny; Agudath Ha-Haredim "Degel Hatorah", led by Rabbi Avraham Ravitz; the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality "Hadash", led by Hashem Mahamid; Moledet, an extreme right-wing movement led by Rechavam Ze'evi; the Arab Democratic Party, led by Abdul Wahhab Darawshah; Ya'oud, led by Gonin Segev, the Minister for Energy; Aliyah, the new immigrants' movement, led by Ephraim Milamed; Yisrael bi Aliyah (Israel in Migration), led by Natan Sharansky; the Third Path, a centrist movement that broke away from the Labour Party, led by Avigdor Kahlani; the Democratic Labour Organization, a leftist movement combining Jewish and Arab activists from the Sharara organization, led by Asaf Adib; Meimad, a religious movement led by Rabbi Yehuda Amital who occupies the post of Minister without Portfolio in the Peres Government; Telem Emunah (the path of faith), which broke away from the Shas movement, headed by Rabbi Yosef Azran; Moreshet Avot, an ultrareligious right-wing party that broke away from Moledet, led by Yosef Bagad; Ahdut lima'an Aliyah (Unity for Migration), which broke away from the Labour Party, led by Ephraim Gur; the Arab Movement for Change, led by Dr. Ahmad al-Teibi; the National Democratic Assembly, an Arab leftist alliance led by Dr. Azmi Bishara; Men's Family Rights ("Raash"), led by Yakov Schluss;

the Arab-Islamic Bloc, led by Abdul Malik Dahamsheh and Sheikh Atef al-Khatib; Yamin Israel, an extreme right-wing racist movement that broke away from Moledet, led by Shaul Gutman; the Settlement Party, led by Tsofir Ronen; the Israeli Pensioners' Movement ("Eil"), led by Nava Arad; and the Progressive Alliance.

2. The Arab party alliances entering the elections

On 10 April 1996, the following four Arab lists were submitted to the Central Electoral Committee: a joint list combining the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality and the Arab National Alliance led by Knesset member Hashem Mahamid; the United Arab List, consisting in an alliance between the Islamic Movement, the Arab Democratic Party and the Arab-Islamic Bloc, led by lawyer Abdul Malik Dahamsheh; the Progressive Arab List for Change, consisting in an alliance between the Arab Movement for Change and the Progressive Movement for Peace; and the Progressive Alliance List of the independent movement "Call for Concord in the Negev", led by Muhammad Zaidan.

On 14 April 1996, there was a merger between the two parties representing Jewish immigrants into Israel: Aliyah, comprising immigrants from the Soviet Union, and the Israel in Migration Party.

3. Political programmes of the Israeli parties

On 27 April 1996, the highest policy-making bodies of Likud, Gesher and Tzomet agreed on the general outline of the political programme that those parties would pursue if they won the forthcoming Israeli elections under the leadership of Binyamin Netanyahu. That programme included the following principles:

(a) The Government, while recognizing the facts resulting from the Oslo agreements, would endeavour to minimize the threats that those agreements posed to the security and future of the State of Israel;

(b) The Government would talk with the Palestinian Authority in order to continue the present arrangements. It would also conduct negotiations with a view to the achievement of a permanent settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, provided that the Palestinian Authority fulfilled all its obligations, particularly in regard to:

(i) Unconditional annulment of the provisions of the Palestine National Charter calling for the destruction of Israel;

(ii) Prevention of terrorism and cessation of inflammatory propaganda against Israel;

(c) Sovereignty over unified Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Israel, would be exercised solely by Israel. All PLO activities in the city would be halted and all PLO institutions there would be closed;

(d) The army and the security forces would enjoy full freedom of action against terrorism wherever and whenever necessary;

(e) The Government would endeavour to continue the policy of granting the Palestinians independent self-government, except in regard to foreign affairs and security, for which Israel would remain responsible, and matters requiring coordination. The Government would oppose the establishment of an independent Palestinian State;

(f) The Government would encourage the development of employment opportunities for Palestinians in the Palestinian self-governing areas;

(g) The Government would endeavour to secure Jordanian involvement in the permanent settlement in fields to be agreed upon during the negotiations.

The Labour Party's new political programme, which was made public on 22 April 1996, clearly omits two provisions that were included in its previous programme; the first concerns rejection of the establishment of a Palestinian State, while the second stipulates that "even in the event of peace, the Israeli presence in, and control of, the Golan Heights will continue".

The Labour Party's political programme stated, in particular, that the negotiations concerning the permanent settlement with the Palestinians would be based on the Oslo agreement and Israel would respect the following principles:

* United Jerusalem would remain the capital of Israel under Israeli sovereignty.

* Israel would never seek to dominate another people.

* The River Jordan constituted a secure eastern border for Israel and no other army would be stationed to the west of it.

* Separation would safeguard the national identity and needs of the two peoples.

* Israel would retain sovereignty over the Jordan Valley, the area to the north-west of the Dead Sea, Gush Etzion and areas vital for Israel's security.

* The Palestinians' right to return would be denied.

* Most of the Israeli settlers would remain under Israeli sovereignty.

* No new settlements would be established.

* The permanent settlement would be submitted to a popular referendum.

* The negotiations with Syria would continue. The desired agreement would be based on secure borders, firmly established security arrangements, a guarantee of the necessary water resources for Israel and full normalization of relations between the two States, with emphasis on economic cooperation. The permanent agreement would be submitted to a popular referendum.

On 8 April 1996, Yossi Sarid, the Israeli Minister for the Environment, declared that the political aims of the Meretz movement were as follows:

(a) Recognition of the Palestinian people's right to establish its own independent entity, consisting in a Palestinian State alongside the State of Israel;

(b) Withdrawal from the Golan in return for full peace with Syria, including special security arrangements;

(c) Retention of 6-7 per cent of the land in the West Bank, on which Israeli settlements have been established, under Israeli sovereignty;

(d) Jerusalem would remain the indivisible capital of Israel.

Confrontation with Israeli right-wing extremists

On 13 April 1996, Shlomo Lahat, the head of the Israeli popular grouping supporting Shimon Peres, received a telephone call from a person claiming to speak on behalf of Yigal Amir who threatened him with death unless he ceased his electioneering activities in favour of the Israeli Labour Party.

On 13 April 1996, Moshe Shahal, the Israeli Minister for Internal Security, received telephone threats from followers of Rabbi Uzi Meshulah who threatened to shoot him unless he met the demands of the rabbi's imprisoned followers who were on hunger strike.

5. Activities of UNRWA

On 1 April 1996, UNRWA used $5 million donated by the Norwegian Government to launch an immediate short-term programme to provide employment opportunities in response to the socio-economic crisis resulting from the closure of the Gaza Strip. Through this programme, UNRWA intends to provide temporary employment opportunities over a five-month period for a total of 2,570 unemployed Palestinians, who will be paid a daily wage of US$ 12. More than 1,300 Palestinians are being recruited by UNRWA (635 in the field of environmental health, 544 in education and 150 in relief and social services, while others are being employed in various UNRWA departments). A further 475 Palestinians are being recruited by non-governmental organizations and more than 100 Palestinians have been recruited by the Palestinian National Authority's Ministries of Health and Justice.

On 17 April 1996, the heads of 11 municipal and village councils in the Gaza Strip took delivery of 17 trucks, 2 bulldozers and 2 tractors which UNRWA had purchased by virtue of a $1.8 million donation from Japan for use in solid waste disposal projects.

The Japanese ambassador Harumiko Shibawa and UNRWA's Director of Operations Claus Worm handed over that equipment at the UNRWA office.

On 17 April 1996, a start was also made on the implementation of the project to construct the Izbat Beit Hanun secondary school for girls, which will be run by the Palestinian Ministry of Education, and the

Izbat Beit Hanun preparatory school for girls, which will be run by the UNRWA Department of Education. The Japanese Government's donation for the construction of these two schools amounted to $2.6 million.

With regard to the role that UNRWA is playing in helping to develop the infrastructure in Palestine, Mr. Worm said that the Agency was continuing to assist in the development of vital sectors in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. For example, it was cooperating with the Ministries of Health and Planning and International Cooperation. It had already constructed two hospitals in the southern part of the Gaza Strip and, two weeks ago, had begun the implementation of environmental projects.

On 4 April 1996, Mr. Robert Hopkins, UNRWA's Director-General in Jordan, opened a legal advisory office at the Centre for Women's Programmes in the Al-Hussein camp. This office was opened with funding from the German Government, which provided about $17,000 for the establishment and equipment of this and another office at Wahdat camp.

On 4 April 1996, UNRWA, acting in collaboration with the Canadian International Development Agency, opened a food production unit at Al-Hussein camp in keeping with the emphasis that the UNRWA is placing on the role of women in economic participation and local community development. The aim of the unit is to enable the most disadvantaged female refugees to acquire the skills and expertise needed to manage projects and improve their family's level of income and to provide opportunities for enterprising female refugees to receive training in production skills.

Mr. Hopkins emphasized that the Agency had no intention of charging school fees for the education that refugee children received at UNRWA schools, nor did it intend to charge fees for the health services that the Agency was providing for refugees at various centres and clinics. In an interview with the Jordanian News Agency, he said that the question as to whether such fees should be charged had been raised by the donor States in 1993 and 1994 and, at the time, it had been decided to charge nominal fees. However, that decision had never been implemented.

With regard to the transfer of UNRWA headquarters from Vienna to Gaza, Mr. Hopkins said that the presence of the Agency's headquarters at Gaza would facilitate and speed up communications between the Commissioner-General and the Agency's local directors of operations and would thereby have a favourable effect on the Agency's services. He said that the Commissioner-General had instructed an expert group to study the situation and living conditions of the Agency's employees and to prepare a report on this subject.

Concerning the Agency's future in the light of developments in the peace process, the Director-General said that the Agency could not be abolished before a final solution had been found to the Palestinian problem. With regard to the Agency's relations with the Jordanian Government, Mr. Hopkins said that there was close coordination and cooperation between various Jordanian government departments, particularly the Department of Palestinian Affairs, and the Agency in the provision of services for refugees.

Mr. Hopkins pointed out that the Agency had recently received an amount of $1 million from Japan to improve the sewage and drainage systems in the Palestinian camps in Jordan. He said that the Agency was suffering from a serious financial situation although, in general, it was in a better position than the United Nations.

In addition to its initial pledge of $15 million to UNRWA's regular budget for 1996, the United States of America had pledged a further donation of $55 million of which part ($200,000) would be appropriated for an external organizational study on the transfer of UNRWA headquarters from Vienna to Gaza. The United States of America had also pledged an amount of $608,608 to improve three school complexes at the Yarmouk camp in the Syrian Arab Republic and an amount of $728,584 for a number of projects in Jordan.

Norway had pledged $5 million for an immediate short-term job creation programme in the Gaza Strip.

The United Nations Population Fund had pledged $132,174 to cover the costs of the family planning programme requirements in the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon, Jordan and the West Bank.

Australia had confirmed its pledge of $100,000 for the transfer of UNRWA headquarters to the region.

Austria had donated $100,000 as part of its pledged donation to the Agency's regular budget in 1996.

The Middle East and Africa Association in Japan had donated $9,447 for the purchase of hearing aids for disabled Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

The Save the Children Fund in the United Kingdom had donated $3,806 for the programme to train midwives in the West Bank.

The Maldives had pledged and paid $1,000 to UNRWA's regular budget for 1996.

Monthly report on the latest developments on the question of Palestine during the month of May 1996

1. Israeli measures in the West Bank

The blockade that had been imposed on the towns, villages and camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 25 February 1996 continued during the month of May, at the beginning of which Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres confirmed that Israel had no intention of lifting the blockade before the Israeli elections. In addition to the blockade, the Israeli authorities tightened the cordon around the Palestinian National Authority areas at dawn on 15 May 1996, i.e. two weeks before the scheduled date of the Israeli elections, on the pretext that intelligence reports had indicated that some groups intended to carry out operations designed to influence the outcome of the elections.

As a result of these tighter restrictions, all the facilities and special permits that had been granted during the previous two months were cancelled and, consequently, the small number of Arab workers who had been permitted to work in Israel could no longer go there.

West Bank towns and areas were isolated from each other through the establishment of military roadblocks on the roads linking them and also on all the roads and entry points leading to Israel and the city of Jerusalem. All the Palestinians who were permitted to enter Israel were subjected to strict security checks, which had detrimental effects on all aspects of life in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Israeli authorities continued their policy of confiscating further areas of Palestinian-owned land in various parts of the West Bank, particularly in the district of Qalqilya, in which more than 300 dunums of land were confiscated, and in the district of Hebron with a view to promoting settlement in that town. Israeli encroachments and violations also continued for the purpose of constructing bypass roads, for which hundreds of trees were uprooted and more land was excavated in the following areas:

A bypass road crossing land belonging to Abud, Rantis and Shuqba in the district of Ramallah.

A bypass road linking the "Green Line" with the settlement of Tzofim to the north of Qalqilya.

An 80-m wide bypass road crossing land belonging to the towns of Jaiyus and Qalqilya.

A bypass road crossing land belonging to Jab'a and Surif.

The construction and expansion of a road crossing land belonging to the villages of Beit Dajan, Salim, Deir el-Hatab and Beit Furik in the governorate of Nablus.

Due to the increase in election fever during this month when the heads of the two leading parties in Israel attempted to win over the electorate,

both Shimon Peres and Binyamin Netanyahu made statements in which they promised to improve the situation of the settlers if they won the election.

On 4 May 1996, it was revealed that there was a new plan to expand the settlement of Givat Zeev, which is situated in the West Bank to the north of the city of Jerusalem. The plan included the construction of a 17-storey residential tower block containing 45 apartments and also a large commercial centre at that settlement. The settlement of Maaleh Adumim at Khan el-Ahmar to the east of the city of Jerusalem also witnessed construction activity and large-scale sales of new residential apartments and the Israel Lands Administration advertised for tenders to construct 80 new residential units at that settlement.

The District Planning and Construction Commission of the Israeli Ministry of the Interior rejected the protests submitted by residents of Sur Bahir, Umm Tuba and the town of Beit Sahur who own the land on which the settlement of Har Homa is to be built even though they hold documents proving their ownership.

On 13 May 1996, the Israeli Government approved the appropriation of 11.5 million shekels for investment in the development of the settlement of Kiryat Sefer, to the west of the town of Ramallah, which is inhabited by ultra-orthodox Jews. This amount covers the costs of completing the construction and development of 510 residential apartments built between 1989 and 1992, as well as half the cost of the construction of 600 new residential units.

According to sources close to the Jewish Settlement Council in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the financial resources that the Labour Government had invested to support settlement activities in the Palestinian territories exceeded those invested by the previous Likud Government for that purpose. The number of settlers had also increased by 40 per cent under the Labour Government.

During the month of May, in addition to demolishing four houses in villages in the districts of Jerusalem, Nablus and Ramallah, the Israeli authorities took a number of measures constituting collective punishments against large sections of the Arab population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These measures included the following:

(a) On 7 May 1996, the Israel Telecommunication Corporation (Bezeq) cut off international communications with the Palestinian Authority areas;

(b) On 8 May 1996, the Israeli electricity company randomly cut off the electric power supply to the town of Gaza without prior notice;

(c) On 7 May 1996, the Israeli authorities closed the new mosque at Qabalan (19 km to the south of Nablus). On 14 May 1996, they also closed two other mosques in the West Bank.

2. The Israeli elections

The most outstanding event on the Israeli scene during the month of May 1996 was the elections to the premiership and the 14th Knesset which were held in the midst of tight security measures and unprecedented international interest and anticipation in view of the effects that these elections would have on the peace process and on the notable changes and activities taking place in the Middle East.

On the morning of 29 May 1996, the 3,339,250 Israelis entitled to vote went to 6,714 polling stations distributed throughout Israel in order to choose the Prime Minister for the next four years and elect 120 members to the 14th Knesset. At midday on 30 May 1996, the Central Electoral Committee announced that Binyamin Netanyahu, the leader of the Likud Party, had been elected Prime Minister by a majority of 50.49 per cent of the votes cast and would therefore succeed his rival Shimon Peres, the leader of the Labour Party, who had obtained 49.51 per cent of the votes.

In these elections, Binyamin Netanyahu was supported by 1,501,033 voters, while his rival Shimon Peres was supported by 1,471,566 voters (a difference of 29,467 or 0.9 per cent) in the first direct poll ever held in Israel to elect, at the same time, the Prime Minister and the members of the Knesset.

Under Israeli law, the new Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu had 45 days in which to form a coalition enjoying the support of 61 of the 120 parliamentary seats as an expression of the Knesset's confidence in the Government that he would form. The seats were distributed among the parties and lists as follows:

The left-wing parties obtained a total of 52 seats, distributed as follows: the Labour Party led by Shimon Peres - 34 seats; the Meretz movement led by Yossi Sarid - 9 seats; the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality led by Hashim Mahamid - 5 seats; and the United Arab List - 4 seats.

The right-wing parties won 43 seats distributed as follows: the Likud-Tzomet-Gesher alliance led by Netanyahu - 32 seats; the National Religious Party (Mafdal) led by Zvulun Hammer - 9 seats; the Moledet Party led by Rechavam Ze'evi - 2 seats.

The orthodox religious parties obtained 14 seats of which 10 were won by Shas, the Sephardic Jewish party, and 4 by Yahdot Hatora led by Meir Porush.

The Third Path party led by Avigdor Kahlani won 4 seats and the Israel bi-Aliyah party led by Natan Sharansky won 7 seats, these two being new parties that were not represented in the previous Knesset.

The other parties were supported by no more than 1.5 per cent of the total number of voters.

3. Activities of UNRWA

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East announced that it would be transferring its headquarters from Vienna to Gaza on 15 July 1996.

At a press conference held on 7 May 1996, Sandro Tucci, head of the UNRWA Information Office, said that UNRWA had been faced with a financial deficit of $1 million during the last two years. However, he affirmed that the Agency would maintain the level of its services, which would be reduced only if there were no other alternative. He said that the UNRWA budget for 1994/95 amounted to $320 million, which had been appropriated in order to cover the cost of basic services such as education, health and relief.

The Commissioner-General of UNRWA decided to grant the Agency's staff in Jordan an increment amounting to 8.1 per cent with effect from 1 July 1996 in view of the petitions that they had submitted to Mr. Peter Hansen and in which they threatened to resort to strike action if their demands were not met.

On 10 May 1996, at Amman, the UNRWA Council of Directors held meetings that were attended by the area directors, the directors of operations and senior administrative staff from the Agency's offices in its five areas of operations (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip). During a visit to Jordan, Mr. Peter Hansen, the Agency's Commissioner-General, was received by His Highness Prince Hassan, the Crown Prince, in his office where they discussed a number of matters and questions concerning UNRWA's role and activities for the benefit of Palestinian refugees, as well as possible solutions to overcome the financial crisis from which the Agency was suffering.

The Agency introduced a uniform examination system for the second academic term in the sixth and ninth basic grades in some subjects taught at its schools.

A joint UNRWA-UNHCR delegation visited 159 refugees who had been stranded on the Egyptian-Libyan border for more than a year. They provided them with medicines and other materials of which they were in need and, on the conclusion of the visit, the delegation held a meeting with the Palestinian and Libyan ambassadors at the Libyan Embassy in Cairo in order to inform them of the results of its mission.

The following donations were reported to have been received by the Agency:

The Swiss-German CARITAS aid organization pledged an amount of $10,000 as a contribution towards the costs of operating a maternal and child care clinic at Am'ari camp in the West Bank in 1996.

Germany pledged an amount of $1,597,366 for the project to construct and furnish a preparatory/secondary school in Lebanon.

Holland pledged an amount of $1,764,706 to the general fund for Lebanon in 1996.

Finland pledged an amount of $1,455,301 to UNRWA's regular budget for 1996.

Norway pledged an amount of $1 million as a contribution to the costs of transferring UNRWA headquarters from Vienna to Gaza and Amman.

The international "Rainbow" ship in Japan pledged an amount of $5,000 to UNRWA's general fund in Jordan. In addition, this organization donated 13 boxes and packages of stationery, games and medicines to the Japanese School and the health centre at the Baqa'a camp in Jordan.

Tenders were received for the commencement of the implementation of agreements signed between the Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) and UNRWA in March, under which a total of $120,000 was pledged to finance the first and second phases of the construction and development of a diesel mechanics workshop for second-year students at the Kalandia Training Centre in the West Bank. The Italian Government was reported to be helping to fund the construction and equipment of the workshop.

Monthly report on the latest developments on the question of Palestine during the month of August 1996

1. Israeli measures in the West Bank

During the month of August 1996, the Israeli authorities continued their measures to tighten the blockade of all the towns in the West Bank and Gaza Strip which is obstructing the freedom of movement of Palestinian citizens between the various self-governing areas. They also continued to prevent the movement of students and goods and fabricated pretexts for the maintenance of this blockade, thereby causing severe material losses to the Palestinian economy and suffering to the Palestinian population.

A report issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Health affirmed that 16 residents of the Palestinian National Authority areas had died as a result of the blockade and the Israeli measures that had been taken against the population, and particularly sick persons, since 25 February.

The Israeli authorities persisted in their refusal to issue transit permits for husbands and wives living in the Gaza Strip and wishing to travel by road to the West Bank. As a result, Palestinian families were split and living in a state of suffering and despair.

During the month, there was a notable escalation in the Israeli assault on the city of Jerusalem and its Arab residents. Representatives of the Israeli police handed an order to Hatim Abdul Qadir, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, prohibiting any activity by the Palestinian Authority in East Jerusalem and requiring him to immediately cease work in the office that he had opened at Beit Hanina in the Jerusalem district. The Israeli police subsequently raided the office, confiscated its contents and closed it.

According to reports received from the Palestinian territories, the Israeli Government had formed a special ministerial team led by Zvulun Hammer, the Minister of Education, and Ehud Olmert, the mayor of Jerusalem, to monitor the application of the so-called "rule of law and order" in East Jerusalem with a view to maintaining full Israeli sovereignty over all parts of the city. This team would be formulating proposals and recommendations to curb infiltration by the Palestinian Authority in Palestinian educational institutions and bodies in the eastern half of the city.

The measures taken against Arab institutions at Jerusalem included the demolition, on 27 August 1996, of the "Laqlaq" building at Bab Hatta in the Old City from which the care of local children and elderly and retired persons was supervised. The demolition operation was carried out on the pretext that the charitable association's meeting hall had been renovated in an illegal manner.

In the face of increasing Israeli pressure on the Palestinian Authority to close all its offices in the city of Jerusalem as one of the preconditions for Israeli withdrawal from the town of Hebron, which had been delayed beyond the date scheduled in the programme for the implementation of the agreements reached between the Israeli and Palestinian parties, the Palestinian

Authority, as a gesture indicative of its good intentions, closed three of its offices in East Jerusalem (the Office for Geographical Studies, the Palestinian Office for Youth and Sports and the Statistical Office). In spite of this Palestinian gesture, however, there were no new developments on the question of withdrawal from Hebron; on the contrary, the Israeli Government continued to procrastinate on this question, claiming that it was endeavouring to formulate a new withdrawal plan comprising a number of modifications in keeping with its view of the situation. The reports went on to say that the Israeli ministerial committee following up on the question of Hebron was endeavouring to formulate a proposal for the division of the town into civil as well as security sectors.

During the period covered by this report, the settlers continued their acts of aggression against Arab citizens and their property. The towns and villages of Beit Jala, Khan Yunis, Deir al-Balah, Yatta, Tubas, Hebron and Qalqilya were subjected to repeated attacks on their land, crops and various items of property by settlers living in the settlements bordering on those areas.

The towns of Qalqilya, Ramallah and Tubas were the target of land confiscation campaigns and encroachments by Israeli bulldozers which excavated and levelled the confiscated land in preparation for the construction of bypass roads to link Jewish settlements at the expense of Arab territorial unity. An example of this can be seen in the construction of the bypass road that crosses land belonging to the village of Madama to the south of Nablus in order to link settlements to the east of Nablus with the road leading to the town of Qalqilya. The Israeli authorities also continued work on the construction of a bypass road in the area of Beit Jala, as well as the construction of a flyover and a tunnel to link the Jewish settlements of Jerusalem with the southern part of the West Bank.

The Israeli authorities also authorized commencement of the construction of a military road in the Bethlehem area to the south of the Arab city of Jerusalem at a cost of $8 million.

With regard to new settlement, the expansion of existing Jewish settlements and the preparation of plans to promote settlement, on 2 August 1996 the Israeli Prime Minister announced that the Cabinet had decided to terminate the freeze on Jewish settlement on Arab land which had been imposed by the previous Israeli Government in August 1992. This aroused indignation among all the international bodies and forums seeking to advance the peace process, and particularly among the Palestinians. Following that decision, Yasser Arafat, the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, sent a letter to Mr. Netanyahu in which he protested against his Government's decision and warned of the dangers inherent in any practical steps to implement that decision.

After the announcement of the lifting of restrictions on settlement, the Jewish settlers lost no time in expanding their settlements. The settlers at Itamar, which was established on land belonging to the villages of Awarta, Rujib and Beit Furik, built a number of houses on the eastern side of the settlement and their example was followed by settlers at Brakha who added a number of houses to their settlement.

The Israeli settlement institutions began to implement the decision by Yitzhak Mordechai, the Minister of Defence, to add prefabricated houses to the settlements by commencing the erection of prefabricated houses at settlements near Jericho.

There was also a notable increase in the pace of construction work at the settlements of Salit, Kokhav Yair, Enav, Avnei Hefetz and others pursuant to the Israeli Government's decision.

The Israeli newspapers revealed a plan that had been prepared by the Jewish Settlement Council in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with a view to increasing the number of settlers to half a million during the next four years.

At a meeting with the heads of the settlements in the West Bank, Eli Suissa, the Minister of the Interior, promised to grant them 15 million shekels in emergency aid as compensation for the Oslo agreements which had increased the expenditure of the Jewish councils. He also promised to give special attention to the structural plans that had been frozen by the previous Government, including a plan to construct 2,500 housing units at the settlement of Adam at Jerusalem.

Israeli press sources indicated that Meir Porush, the Israeli Deputy Minister for Housing, intended to construct 15,000 housing units for orthodox Jews, including 6,500 units at the western entrance to Jerusalem, 3,500 units at the settlement of Kiryat Sefer and 900 units at the settlement at Beitar. On 27 August 1996, the Israeli Minister of Defence approved a plan for the construction of 900 new residential units at the settlement of Kiryat Sefer in the Ramallah district. He decided that the implementation of the construction plan at this settlement should begin immediately and the settlement residential area would include 1,806 housing units. The other 900 units would be approved at a later stage.

Within the framework of the settlement assault on the Holy City, it was revealed that the Israeli Ministry of Housing was preparing a plan to build a new settlement city at a distance of a few metres from the city of Jerusalem to the north of the settlements of Neve Yaacov and Givat Zeev in the direction of Ramallah.

During the month, there was also a notable escalation in the policy of demolishing Arab-owned houses. On 19 August 1996, Israeli bulldozers demolished four houses at Beit Dajan on the pretext that they were situated in a military zone. On 12 August 1996, Israeli bulldozers also demolished five houses in the villages of Kafr Aqab, Hizma and Anata on the pretext that they had been built without a permit. Five other houses situated on the borders of Jerusalem Municipality at Isawiya, Sur Bahir and Silwan were also demolished on the pretext that they had been built without a permit. Moreover, on 28 August 1996, the Israeli authorities demolished five other houses near Tulkarm and another house in the Semiramis area of Ramallah on the same pretext.

2. The internal situation in Israel

On 8 August 1996, Yaacov Neeman, the Israeli Minister of Justice, tendered his resignation from the Government after the Israeli police had questioned him on suspicion of involvement in a number of criminal offences, including obstruction of the course of justice during the trial of Aryeh Deri, the leader of the Shas movement.

The Israeli Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs agreed to appoint General Dan Shomron, the former Chief of Staff, as chairman of the Higher Supervisory and Steering Committee that will be responsible for implementing the transitional stage agreement with the Palestinian Authority. It was also agreed to form a steering committee at ministerial level, chaired by the Prime Minister and comprising the Minister of Defence and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, to direct the parallel negotiations with the Syrians and Lebanese.

On 21 August 1996, the legal adviser to the Israeli Government instructed the head of the investigation department in the police to question Knesset member Dedi Zucker from the Meretz movement on suspicion of receiving funds through fraud and deception.

On 23 August 1996, the Israeli Prime Minister decided to form an advisory group on national security, headed by Lieutenant General Zeev Levi, which would be attached to the Office of the Prime Minister.

On 28 August 1996, Turkey and Israel signed an agreement providing for cooperation and an exchange of expertise between the two parties in the defence industries.

3. Activities of UNRWA

On 25 August 1996, the Palestinian President Yasser Arafat unveiled the commemorative plaque at the headquarters of UNRWA in the governorate of Gaza to herald the commencement of work at the Agency's new headquarters at Gaza to which it had moved from Vienna about three months earlier.

During the inaugural ceremony, President Arafat was accompanied by a number of senior officials of the Palestinian Authority together with Mr. Peter Hansen, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, with whom he carried out an inspection visit to the various parts of the building.

On 27 August 1996, Mr. Hansen met with Dr. Nabil Shaath, the Minister for Planning and International Cooperation, at the Ministry's headquarters at Gaza. During the meeting, they discussed the manner in which the Palestinian National Authority could support and assist the Agency in order to ensure the continuity of its services to Palestinian refugees living in Palestine or abroad. They also discussed a plan to cover the Agency's budgetary deficit,

as well as the role that the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation would be playing in helping the Agency to obtain what it needed to avoid any reduction in its health, food and educational services.

Minister Shaath explained that the Agency was the body responsible for the refugees and the Palestinian National Authority did not constitute a substitute for the Agency, the activities of which would end only when the problem of the refugees had been fully solved.

On 31 August 1996, studies began in the new academic year at all the UNRWA schools in the Gaza Strip, where 140,000 male and female students attended 163 primary and preparatory schools.